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SUBJECT: THE RAMOS-HORTA ROAD SHOW -- BRINGING THE STATE TO THE PEOPLE

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Summary

¶1. (U) On January 7 - 9, PolOff accompanied President Jose Ramos-Horta on a government goodwill mission to two remote eastern towns to build support for his Anti-Poverty Task Force and outline the government's top priorities for 2008: resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs), reaching a settlement with dissident members of the Armed Forces (F-FDTL), and reining in military renegade Major Alfredo Reinado. Ramos-Horta was warmly received in Baguia, a former resistance stronghold, but enjoyed only a lukewarm greeting in Quelicai. Ramos-Horta promised infrastructure and service improvements, held marathon-length community dialogues, and provided sports equipment to the towns. Beyond from his goodwill outreach, Ramos-Horta is traveling to districts to regain legitimacy eroded during the 2006 crisis and build support for the government's efforts to address security concerns. Reasserting himself as the national mediator, Ramos-Horta is appealing to shared Timorese identity to overcome persisting ethnic and political divisions. At a stop at a former Indonesian Air Force base, Ramos-Horta told PolOff that while there should be accountability for Indonesian human rights violations during the occupation, the U.S. should immediately normalize military ties to Indonesia. End Summary.

Thirty-Plus SUV Convoy into the Mountains

¶2. (U) Escorted by Timorese and UN police, President Jose Ramos-Horta led a 30-vehicle strong SUV convoy on January 7-9 to eastern Baucau district, accompanied by the Minister of Health, a State Secretary from the Ministry of Education, the Commander of the F-FDTL, three parliamentarians, local officials, advisors, diplomats, and his son Loro. After a five-hour plus journey, the Presidential entourage finally arrived in Baguia, a resistance stronghold during the Indonesian occupation. Although the applause was at times prompted by a Presidential

aide, Baguia residents received Ramos-Horta warmly. Commander of the Defense Forces Taur Matan Ruak, who spent several years in the mountains surrounding Baguia during the resistance, recalled that over 140,000 Timorese sought refuge in the nearby mountains.

Ask and You Shall Receive

13. (U) President Ramos-Horta engaged in multiple, marathon-length dialogues, including a centerpiece three-hour community-wide dialogue with 1,500 - 2,000 residents. After listening to requests from village heads, Ramos-Horta delivered a one-hour response in which he underscored the government's 2008 priorities and he promised resources for public services, including health clinics and schools.. Ramos-Horta highlighted his Anti-Poverty Task Force, designed to implement "quick-fix" projects. He promised 100 tables and chairs for the local school within a month. In response to a petition presented by a community member, Ramos-Horta made an immediate commitment of \$10,000 for health clinic improvements.

14. (U) Ramos-Horta also presented his political and security agenda. He spelled out his top priorities: re-integrating persons displaced by last year's crisis; reaching a settlement with a disgruntled faction of the armed forces known as "the petitioners;" and reining in the fugitive former head of the military police, Maj. Alfredo Reinado. Refuting a charge by the opposition FRETILIN party, Ramos-Horta explained the constitutional basis for forming the current governing coalition formation, and he repeatedly called for national reconciliation through dialogue. Responding to a hostile question, Ramos-Horta described Alfredo as an "individual victim" of the 2006 crisis, adding, "we are all victims of the 2006 crisis." In side comments to PolOff later, Ramos-Horta said that Reinado would

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likely need a form of amnesty, but this would be addressed only after resolution of the petitioners' issue. Ramos-Horta added that he regarded the Alfredo case as easier to solve than that of the petitioners.

15. (U) In a town where houses were burned during the 2006 crisis, Ramos-Horta underscored the importance of addressing national-level security concerns immediately. After the community dialogue, Ramos gave sports equipment to the community, tossed up the opening ball in a volleyball match (in which diplomats participated), and met with village heads for three hours.

Lukewarm Reception in FRETILIN Stronghold

16. (SBU) After completing its program at Baguia, the party continued to Quelicai. Presidential advisors confided that security conditions in Quelicai were more uncertain than Baguia, and that they had considered canceling the stop, as they had a proposed visit to Viqueque a few weeks ago. With an additional 12-15 UN police in riot gear, Ramos-Horta was greeted by over 1,000 community members. While not overtly hostile, the crowd was noticeably less welcoming and smaller than in Baguia, even though Quelicai is twice as large. Loro Ramos-Horta, the President's son and informal advisor, contrasted this lukewarm reception with the hero's welcome that Ramos-Horta and Gusmao received there in 2002 and 2003. The President enjoys these district trips, Loro said, but also uses them to reassert his legitimacy in the wake of the 2006 crisis and establish himself as a national leader after his many years abroad.

17. (U) At the town hall dialogue, village heads raised

community-level concerns such as roads, electricity, health, and water. They also raised national-level issues, including reparations for victims of violence in the 2006 crisis, the Reinado case; and the constitutionality of governing coalition. After sporting events and small group question and answer sessions, Ramos-Horta met with village heads (about 99 percent male) for three hours. Ramos-Horta stayed on message: highlighting the Anti-Poverty Task Force and calling for reconciliation as a principle to addressing security and political grievances. Ramos-Horta made considerably fewer promises for development projects in Quelicai than in Baguia.

18. (SBU) FRETILIN's influence in Quelicai was apparent. Echoing a FRETILIN grievance, a village head questioned the constitutionality of the President's formation of the current governing coalition. Ramos-Horta defended the constitutionality of the governing coalition and called for cooperation with FRETILIN. Ramos-Horta told the crowds that he has received FRETILIN's agreement to work together to solve the government's top three priorities of IDPs, petitioners, and Alfredo. A village head questioned why the President brought F-FDTL leaders on these district trips. Ramos-Horta portrayed F-FDTL's participation as a show of unity between political and military leaders, also drawing the comparison of American presidents traveling with military leaders.

Ramos-Horta Urges Normalization Of U.S. - Indonesian Military
Ties

19. (SBU) On the way back to Dili, Ramos-Horta stopped at F-FDTL Battalion I HQ near Baucau, a former Indonesian Air Force base during the occupation. In a side conversation, Ramos-Horta noted to PolOff that U.S.-manufactured aircraft had been based there during the occupation. However, he went on to express unequivocal support for a full normalization of the Indonesia - U.S. mil-mil relationship, specifically encouraging us to extend basic training, human rights training, arms sales - he made no caveats or exceptions. Regarding human rights violations committed in Timor-Leste by Indonesian security forces, Ramos-Horta said, "For Timor, it is the past." When asked about

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cases where there was evidence of specific individuals involved in specific human rights violations, Ramos-Horta responded, "Well, if there is a direct connection, there should be accountability." Ramos-Horta added that if the U.S. did not sell weapons to Indonesia, someone else would. The President said that he has conveyed this message to his friends in Congress.

The Church as "Nation-Builder". . .

10. (U) The Catholic Church functioned as the physical and symbolic center for the Baguia and Quelicai visits. At both stops, Ramos-Horta was greeted by the missionary priests, who would sit directly next to Ramos-Horta during community dialogues. The churches were the most prominent community buildings and both housed orphanages for 30-40 young children. In Quelicai, the Portuguese priest had served there for 50 years and just completed a \$1 million building project.

11. (U) In conversation with PolOff, Ramos-Horta commented that nation-building and state-building must occur simultaneously in Timor-Leste. Since 90 to 95 percent of Timorese are Catholic, the Church provides a unifying force for the Timor's sixteen ethno-linguistic groups, according to Ramos-Horta. In divided

communities, the Catholic Church occupies a neutral role. As the Filipino priest in Baguia said, "I knew these guys (resistance leaders) when they were in the mountains during the Indonesian occupation."

. . . And The Government and Armed Forces as "State-Builder"

¶12. (SBU) Ramos-Horta also stressed to PolOff that his visits to the districts were meant to make the responsiveness of the state a reality in these isolated areas. During community dialogues, Ramos-Horta repeatedly referred to "el sentido del estado," the sense of state. The Anti-Poverty Task Force represents an immediate, quick-impact program for the government to provide better public services to communities. Ramos-Horta pledged to work on improving roads, education, health care, electricity, water and sanitation, and other public services. Ramos-Horta also vowed to address national-level political and security issues - IDPs, petitioners, and Alfredo Reinado. Visits to Battalion headquarters and the presence of F-FDTL in the delegation highlighted the critical role Ramos-Horta places on the armed forces within state-building. As he is attempting to build personal legitimacy through these district visits, Ramos-Horta is also trying to establish the legitimacy of the government as well.

¶13. (U) This report was prepared by TDY Political Officer Scott Kofmehl.
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